

Local Staff Training

Although your data entry staff member or director may understand all of the procedures for collecting ABE2005 data, your program still may not end up with high quality data if you lack one key element: a system for training your staff. Without training, staff will not know or understand the procedures and will implement procedures in incomplete or haphazard ways, hurting data reliability and validity.

It is impossible to over-emphasize the importance of a strong, effective system of professional development on data collection issues. All too often programs put much effort into developing forms and procedures and put little thought or resources into training. In addition, the training cannot be an afterthought or a one-time session, such as an annual workshop that is part of a state conference or a review of the ABE2005-06 procedures manual. While this type of training is necessary, it is not sufficient to produce quality data. The training should engage staff and be an ongoing feature of your program—offered on a regular basis at convenient times. Training should also be based on the needs of staff, focusing on areas where there is lack of knowledge or where performance is poor. Regular needs assessments on data collection issues will help identify training topics.

Procedures and Policies

The Idaho State Department of Education/Adult Basic Education Office provides training on data collection and your program may also provide training directly to staff on the specific procedures at your site. Use the assessment evaluation form and checklist provided during the Data Quality Workshop to rate your program in the following areas, which reflect good professional development processes.

1. Staff has received training on state policy and data collection procedures.

All of your staff should be trained and fully knowledgeable of state policy as outlined in the ABE2005 manual, accountability policies and the data collection procedures in your program. Training on data collection should cover not only each individual's job in the process, but include a review of others' roles and how each activity affects the other. The training must be specific and detailed, including such mundane topics as completing forms, data entry procedures, error checking, and the ABE2005 database, along with general accountability requirements. For example, the training should review intake and goal setting procedures, assessment policies and follow-up requirements.

2. Data collection definitions and procedures are addressed during new staff orientation.

You should ensure that new staff members receive training soon after they start and that there is opportunity for follow-up and ongoing training. Initial training on state accountability requirements and data collection procedures should be added to each new staff member's individual professional development plan.

3. A system of continuous professional development on data collection is in place.

"One-shot" trainings on any topic generally do not have lasting impact. Staff will forget procedures, find they misunderstood some part of the training or may think some procedures do not work effectively and not follow them. A continuous system of professional development will help resolve these problems and given the general high turnover among adult education staff, will also give you an ongoing mechanism to train new staff as they join your program. You should schedule training regularly throughout the year and also employ different modalities of training to improve effectiveness and impact on data collection procedures. For example, you might schedule general workshops, individual peer mentoring, shadowing or project-based learning activities.

4. Training addresses staff needs.

Although all staff should receive an initial, general training on data collection and state accountability requirements, you should design training according to the needs of your staff. Using a periodic formal or informal needs assessment, collaborative planning process or review of procedures, such as presented during the Data Quality Workshop, you can identify areas where staff needs or wants further training. Establishing a process for comparing outcome data among teachers will also assist you in identifying staff training needs. Using this input to design training will make it more relevant to staff, thereby increasing interest and the likelihood that the training will result in improved data collection procedures.

5. Use effective trainers, who use interactive and hands-on activities, to lead training.

The trainers who provide training to local staff are almost as important as the content of the training. Use trainers that your staff respects and recognizes as knowledgeable of the data collection process. Otherwise, staff is likely to disregard or ignore the training. Select trainers who are articulate, well

organized and who respect the contributions and input of participants in the training. In addition, the training is likely to be more effective if it employs interactive, hands-on activities, rather than a lecture or “talking head.” For example, you might ask staff to look at actual data tables and try to troubleshoot problems on their own, use peer teaching or try role-playing or demonstrations.

6. Training results in learning and improved practice.

The goal of professional development is to change staff behavior. For training on data collection, the desired outcome is that staff learns and then correctly follows all procedures. While it is difficult to determine a cause-effect relationship between professional development, learning and behavior change, you can look at general patterns in data or observe staff at work to get an indication of training effectiveness. For example, after a training on assessment, you could observe staff administering tests or review learner assessment records. You could examine the assessment data produced by individual staff members to look for clues about procedural differences. Whatever the method you use, you will have a better professional development approach if it includes ways to verify staff learning and implementation of procedures staff has learned.

Indicators of Performance

If you want to examine our program’s training further, there are several ways to investigate. You should discuss training with staff involved in data collection and observe staff members as they do their job. Your program’s data can also give you clues about what training might be needed.

Discuss with staff. Talk to all staff members involved in data collection about what they do, what they are not clear about and what they think they could do better. Through this discussion you might also explore areas of resistance among staff and reasons why the process is not working as it should. Staff may also have insights into ways to resolve data collection problems. You could use this information to work with staff to identify a plan for training to improve areas of weakness.

Observe data collection. Observe staff most directly involved in data collection to evaluate whether processes are working as you envision them. For example, observe how data are entered, forms completed and missing or erroneous data are resolved. Identify areas of strength and weakness and discuss with staff.

Review program data. Review your program’s data for anomalies, missing data and other inconsistencies to get insight into areas where more training may be

needed. You should examine data tables and look at data entered or collected by individual staff members. For example, you could examine:

- ❖ Amount of missing data by measure and for individual staff members.
- ❖ Dates when data are collected and entered.
- ❖ Out-of-range data or data that are impossible---for example, dates in the future, ages too old or too young, gender or ethnicity errors.

When you evaluate these data, consider whether your program's data collection policies and procedures are clear and understandable. If procedures are well defined but data are still suspect, there may be a need for more and better staff training.